

OAK PARK-RIVER FOREST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE STRATEGIC PLAN

It has been said that planning is good, but doing is better and while planning can be a time consuming project, it is an important step for any organization. The Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce completed its first long-range plan in 2001 with a revised version approved in 2004. Since that time, the environment has continued to change and so has our organization. A planning group was convened to review the Strategic Plan and revised it to reflect where the Chamber has been and where it should be going. This revised strategic plan will help the Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce identify the issues facing the business community served by the Chamber.

Since the 2004 plan was developed, the Chamber has recognized significant shifts in the needs of Chamber members and the business community in general. Some of these changes address the Chamber's role in addressing significant issues within the business community. It will be important to determine how to gather information from our members and how do we share information with our members. The Chamber must address how to prioritize specific issues and develop a mechanism to establish a position for specific business related issues. Also of significance is the need to develop a broader base of support within the organization to enable the Chamber to expand its reach, expertise and support to the business community in Oak Park and River Forest.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

One of the most important components to the planning process is the Strategic Planning Committee. The purpose of this committee was to oversee the planning process and to begin to develop a list of strategic issues to address the issues facing the businesses in the community. The Planning Committee members include:

Margaret Amato
Steve Berggren
Curtis Cruver
Jim Doss
Jason Edgecombe

Susie Goldschmidt
Jennifer GoodSmith
Richard Harrison
Paul McKenna
Joan Ormsby

This group met to evaluate the previous strategic plan and to discuss the necessary changes to enable the Chamber to grow and respond to the needs of its members. The group reviewed the organization's strengths, weaknesses and discussed opportunities and challenges facing the Chamber. As a result a series of new goals and objectives were identified along with tactics designed to help implement these activities.

OPRF CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MISSION:

THE OAK PARK-RIVER FOREST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IS A LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION WHICH FOSTERS AND PROMOTES BUSINESSES AND BUSINESS INTERESTS IN THE OAK PARK AND RIVER FOREST AREA.

OPRF CHAMBER OF COMMERCE VISION:

THE OAK PARK-RIVER FOREST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IS THE MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE FOR BUSINESSES IN THE COMMUNITY.

ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS THAT GUIDE THIS PLAN

STRENGTHS:

The Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce is respected for providing its members with networking opportunities as well as social opportunities for many businesses in the community. The Business After Hours and the BRAG meeting are well attended and generally receive high praise from the members. There are significant referrals and other promotional opportunities that provide general information regarding area businesses, and the Community Guide and map are well respected as valued collateral. The Chamber-sponsored workshops also offer the smaller businesses an educational opportunity on business related topics. The quality of these topics has been enhanced over the past few years, responding to the needs of Chamber members regarding issues of concern to their business development. The location of the Chamber provides good visibility and the presence of the Executive Director in the community is also a strength.

OPPORTUNITIES:

One of the significant opportunities facing the Chamber is advocacy—the opportunity to share information with other entities and municipalities as well as with current and prospective members and the community at large. In order for the Chamber to be recognized as a leading business advocacy group, the Chamber must be proactive and define its role with the villages and other area businesses in an effort to become a resource for businesses in a rapidly changing world. In an effort to build a stronger business community, the OPRF Chamber has an opportunity to engage members in networking opportunities provide mentoring opportunities and support the formation of sub groups to nurture special business interests. This will engage the community and support the Chamber's position as a leading business advocacy unit.

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES:

The OPRF Chamber of Commerce needs to focus its attention on building relationships to support its various activities with various constituents. These relationships will engage the Chamber with its members and prospective members through active communications, networking and the support of business development throughout the community. Retention of members is a critical issue and in order to be successful in this endeavor, it is important that the Chamber determine how the members want to be supported and what programming would be beneficial. The Chamber has an opportunity to keep track of these needs and issues for the entire business community. This will require a significant review of how to best identify and respond to the needs within the community. The Chamber is also challenged by the need for additional volunteers to support Chamber programs and activities, particularly at the leadership levels.

CRITICAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES

GOAL I: **ADVOCACY**

To be a proactive leader within the community to identify and address business or community issues to be recognized as a leading business advocate unit.

Strategy 1: Chamber Position
 Identify the Chamber's position on managing community issues.

Tactics:

1. Establish the Chamber's position to support management of business issues that affect the community.
2. Communicate the Chamber's role with members and other entities in the community.
3. Establish criteria and develop a process to manage business issues and engage our members in the discussion.

Strategy 2: Issue Identification
 Identify business issues that impact the community.

Tactics:

1. Through the Chamber Advocacy Committee, lead the proactive identification and support of local business issues.
2. Identify resources, process and criteria to lead community discussions.
3. Solicit input from the business community and the community at large regarding specific issues.
4. Conduct quarterly opinion polls or online surveys to identify specific issues and identify potential solutions.

Strategy 3: Issue Management
Serve as a liaison between existing organizations.

Tactics:

1. Establish quarterly forums for open discussion of business issues.
2. Meet regularly with business organizations and village officials to discuss pending issues.
3. Moderate panel discussions designed to bring both sides of pending issues to light for the community at large.
4. Build relationships within the community to support business development and issues.

GOAL II: BUSINESS RESOURCE

To serve as a resource for chamber members to provide access to activities that expands and supports their businesses.

Strategy 1: Networking and Training Opportunities
Provide networking and training opportunities for Chamber members.

Tactics:

1. Host new member orientations to share opportunities available to members.
2. Conduct networking opportunities including BRAG meetings and BAHs.
3. Host quarterly training programs addressing business issues of concern to members by sharing expertise of other members.
4. Assess the value of the educational programming and revise plan to meet member needs.
5. Develop a mentoring program to support new member introduction into the organization.

Strategy 2: Resource Development
Provide access to business management support through the Chamber.

Tactics:

1. Develop a community business resource guide for members.
2. Provide opportunities for Chamber members to seek answers to business questions.
3. Serve as a clearinghouse to address member business issues.

GOAL III: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

To improve and enhance the Chamber's market position and prominence.

Strategy 1. Brand Identification
Establish a consistent brand for the Chamber.

Tactics:

1. Implement and maintain consistent branded publications that share similar key messages.
2. Maintain the monthly Chamber sponsored newspaper column to introduce new members.
3. Brand all ads, publications and Web to relate the same message in all mediums
4. Share the mission and vision on a consistent basis to encourage understanding and acceptance of Chamber goals.
5. Implement a consistent visual identity.

Strategy 2: Member Expectations
Identify member needs and expectations and provide programming to meet those needs.

Tactics:

1. Conduct ongoing research with members to evaluate Chamber activities and establish future programming.
2. Survey each Chamber member annually to determine how to best support member needs.

Strategy 3: Chamber Marketing/Communications
Market the Chamber to members and the community.

Tactics:

1. Distribute a minimum of four member newsletters annually.
2. Seek coverage in the local papers regarding the Chamber position on a specific issue on a bi-monthly basis.
3. Build the content and use of the Web site to support Chamber members and serve as a resource for the entire community.
4. Develop an annual community guide and map to be distributed throughout the community.

Strategy 4: Promotions and Special Events
Implement creative and fun promotional and special events that generate community awareness and additional revenue.

Tactics:

1. Host Athena Awards on a bi-annual basis.

2. Participate in key community outreach efforts (parades, Day in Our Village) to enhance the awareness of the Chamber activities.
3. Establish promotions with member businesses to share with the community-at-large or other members.
4. Provide support and publicity for the annual Davy Award presented at the Day in Our Village event.
6. Develop a community event (progressive dinner) that will establish the value of the Chamber of Commerce with the members and the community at large.

GOAL IV: CHAMBER STRUCTURE

To ensure the long term viability and growth of the organization through sound fiscal management and efficient Chamber management.

Strategy 1: Recruitment and Retention

By adding new members or maintaining existing members, increase membership to 15% of registered businesses in Oak Park and 25% of registered businesses in River Forest.

Tactics:

1. Conduct a poll to determine the needs and expectations for all members.
2. Communicate the value of membership to all new and prospective members.
3. Encourage all members to recruit a minimum of one new member annually.
4. Develop a more effective referral reporting system.
5. Develop a new member buddy (sponsorship) program to encourage mentoring.
6. Develop and implement communications tools for new member program.
7. Review and upgrade member benefit programs.

Strategy 2: Partnerships

Establish mechanisms to support the dissemination of information throughout the community

Tactics:

1. Establish a preferred partner program with Chamber members to share special promotions with the community at large or other members.
2. Partner with tourism organizations to share information with the community at large.
3. Partner with area organizations to support the dissemination of information regarding the community.
4. Utilize the Web to share local information regarding the community and its events and services with the public at large.

Strategy 3: Fiscal Management

Manage the long-term stability and viability of the Chamber through efficient fiscal management to exceed expenses by 4% annually.

Tactics:

1. Generate additional revenue generators to support ongoing growth.
2. Streamline existing revenue streams.

Strategy 4: Staff Support

Improve management structure of the Chamber to ensure excellent service for members and the community.

Tactics:

1. Evaluate the staffing structure to determine the balance of staff resources and work to be accomplished.
2. Maintain standard procedures and staff development to ensure efficient staff management.
3. Identify additional volunteers to support Chamber activities.
4. Increase the role and responsibilities of volunteers.
5. Improve office and technology infrastructure.

Strategy 5: Board Development

Support Chamber development through the management of a strong working Board of Directors.

Tactics:

1. Implement a board development plan
2. Establish a succession plan for the Board and standing committees to maximize board support.
3. Conduct a review of the strategic plan on an annual basis.
4. Develop a new board orientation for new members.
5. Set goals, responsibilities and expectations for each board committee.
6. Actively recruit new members to serve on sub committees.
7. Involve a broader mix of members at Chamber events and activities.